

Chapter 3

Leaving Your Loved Ones Behind

It is important that the people in your life understand what deployment is and what it means. It's the assignment of military personnel to temporary, unaccompanied tours of duty. Deployment is a fact of military life. Deployment can be very stressful and is doubly hard for reservists who must not only leave their families, but their civilian employment as well. It is critical for you to be prepared! You can help make deployment less stressful, and more successful, if you plan ahead.



The Three Stages of Deployment

Military separations include three stages: Pre-deployment, the separation itself, and reunion. Each stage carries unique challenges and tasks for family members. Your family needs time to adjust to these demands. Learning about deployment will help ease the physical and emotional demands on the service member, family members, friends, relatives, and co-workers.

Pre-deployment Stage: Before the member leaves on a deployment.

The pre-deployment stage begins with notification of the deployment. This period actually lasts 6 to 8 weeks after the member leaves, and can seem like an emotional roller coaster. The most common response is similar to the grief cycle.

Separation Stage: The deployment itself.

This stage begins when the family adjusts to the separation and establishes a new level of functioning.

The Reunion Stage:

The third and final stage is reunion. Reunion is almost a mirror image of the Pre-Deployment stage. You may find yourself having the ups and downs starting a few weeks prior to the member's return. The adjustment period also lasts about 6 to 8 weeks and can be the most difficult stage of the deployment.

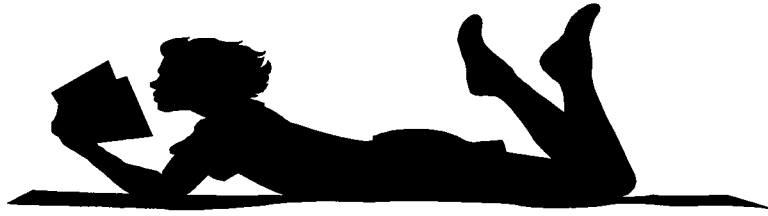
The Emotional Cycle of Deployment

The following cycle describes changes in family behavior and emotions during deployments:

Pre-Deployment Stage		Separation Stage		Reunion Stage	
Anticipation of Loss	Emotional Disorganization	Stabilization	Anticipation of Reunion	Readjustment	State of Equilibrium
Frustration Detachment Denial Shock Anger Rejection	Despair Irritability Confusion Loneliness Sleeplessness Overwhelmed	Calm Self-assured Adjusting to being alone Detachment Confidence	Joy Excitement Apprehension Expectation Hope	Renegotiation of marriage & family Disappointment Ecstasy Change Relief Guilt	Relative Tranquility A partner to share the joys and responsibilities of life with.

Feelings exist - they are not good or bad. Therefore, ways of coping can and will vary with each person. Getting ready for deployment starts long before the military member walks out of the door. Many people tend to ignore that the deployment will actually happen; fantasize that the plane will break down before the military member can get on it, or that something will happen so their spouse does not have to leave. The Family members may try to avoid the recognition of the reality of the departure. Suddenly, a small event, a date, or a commonplace happening will trigger an emotion and/or recognition of the fact that the departure is imminent and real.

Thus the cycle begins...Anticipation of Loss



Preparing for the Mobilization

In the days or weeks prior to leaving, families may experience:

- Difficulty accepting the reality of leaving or separating;
- Feeling an increase in tension; arguments may happen;
- Cramming in of activities/projects - fixing up the house, lawn mower, washing machine, etc.;
- Feelings of anger, frustration, and emotional distance between family members.
- Difficulty with intimacy and sexual relations. It is hard to feel warm and loving - when feeling angry with each other: "It's easier just to let him/her go." Or there may be an increase in such activities as clinging, or fearing the loss of the lover/support person.
- Symptoms of restlessness, irritability, anxiety, feeling an inability to cope, concern about the changes in the home environment that will occur.
- Women may cry unexpectedly and men may withdraw. Allow this to happen, to an extent, as it is essential to release the varying emotions.
- Some couples deny the forthcoming separation by putting off chores, discussions, not facing the inevitable, and procrastinating.

Detachment and Withdrawal

- A sense of despair.
- Feeling the marriage is out of control and a desire to separate.
- A lack of energy, feelings of fatigue and depression.
- Difficulty in making decisions.
- Ambivalence towards one's partner and sex. It is difficult to be physically intimate when trying to separate emotionally. This should be viewed as a reaction to deployment rather than rejection.
- No longer share thoughts and feelings.
- Remember these feelings and events are normal. Your marriage is not breaking up or going down

the tubes. While you are both together in the same house, you are mentally and emotionally preparing for the separation. This is a necessary adjustment to reality.

First, the service member and family experience a level of shock, then denial. For example, "I won't say anything, because it may get canceled anyway," or "this won't really affect me/us very much" are forms of denial. Anxiety also rises during this period. The initial shock, denial, and anxiety reactions usually last about one to two days, but can linger. Sadness follows the first reactions. Sometimes people use bargaining, such as children saying "I'll do what you tell me if you don't go." Anger and resentment are common experiences just prior to the member's departure. This reaction makes sense, because it is our human way of adjusting to the loss. Your most likely targets for anger and resentment are the military, your spouse, and your children. We use this to protect ourselves from the pain, so if your partner becomes irritable at this point, try to listen and understand.

You can reflect back to your spouse or children the emotions you notice. For instance, if your spouse seems angry, say, "You seem angry." This response gives both of you the opportunity to discuss your feelings about the deployment.

Don't forget to talk with your children. They are sensitive to changes in their environment. Remember if they aren't told what is happening, they will use their own fantasies to understand. Children are naturally self-centered, so they blame themselves in their fantasies. Talking to them gives them relief and gives them the chance to ask questions so they can try to understand.

Planning ahead will help alleviate problems and worries. Discuss and arrange responsibilities and

household duties before the military member leaves. Get your children involved in planning for the changes you expect during the separation. Try to spend quality time with close family members before

a deployment. Plan a trip or activity, if time allows. It's helpful to have warm thoughts and lasting memories before the member leaves.

Emotional Disorganization



Partners often experience:

- Shock when the deployment actually arrives.
- An initial sense of relief that the pain of saying goodbye is over may be followed by feelings of guilt and emotional turmoil - "If I love him/her, why am I relieved that she/he's gone?"
- Feeling numb, aimless and without purpose as old routines have been disrupted and new ones have not been established.
- Depression, and the desire to withdraw from the world, family, and friends, especially if a friend's family is still together.
- Feeling of being overwhelmed by responsibility and trying to be everything and do it all.
- Sleep disruption due to loss of security and the support person; tendency to sleep too much (to escape) or too little. Eating disorders may surface or become worse.
- Feeling anger at the military member for not doing more around the home for safety/security reasons.
- Feeling anger at the military for taking the service member away when you needed them most;
- Feeling restless, confused, disorganized, indecisive and irritable at everyone, especially the children.
- Feeling guilty for things that didn't (or did) happen before separation.
- Getting "stuck" at this stage can create an unwillingness to move on emotionally and can be detrimental to a healthy adjustment.

Once the member is gone, a host of emotions and feelings rise. Loneliness, guilt, frustration, feeling overwhelmed, confusion, and fears are most common. Each of these reactions results from the separation, and the member and the family may experience some or all of them. Loneliness comes from the isolation and the loss. Guilt comes from

several sources such as having acted irritable or angry prior to departure. Frustration and feeling overwhelmed come from the realization of what demands the separation places on you. Confusion is common in younger children. Fears are common in all people, such as fear of infidelity, fear of abandonment, and fear of loss.

Remaining active counteracts these reactions, as does talking to friends and making use of your social support networks like neighbors, coworkers, friends, and other spouses in similar circumstances.

Discussing your fears, *IN A NON-ACCUSATORY WAY* (including any fears of infidelity), with your spouse is the best way to deal with them.

Listening to your children and avoiding lecturing helps reduce their fears and confusion. Try to keep your children's routines as stable as possible. For instance, keep bedtimes and mealtimes the same. Sometimes children act out their emotions, because they don't have the sophistication to express themselves verbally. They withdraw, become aggressive, lie, steal, or have nightmares. Some children regress to prior behaviors, such as bedwetting. Some children may have difficulty concentrating; school performance may suffer or they may lose interest in things, or become more impulsive. These are their means to express themselves, and if questioned, they probably won't be able to explain their reasons.

So what can you do about the changes in behavior? Start with talking. You can start a conversation with "I've noticed...." The most important part of talking to your children will be listening to what they say. You could also ask other parents for advice. If problems persist or are severe, seek assistance

through your Family Readiness Group, unit Chaplain, or other professional.

A few weeks after the member leaves, people often experience sleep difficulties, episodes of crying, irritability, and tension. Remaining active, finding a

hobby, and focusing on the tasks at hand help you get through this period.

Coping with Separation

Deployment periods provide for a time of self-growth. For most families, a deployment isn't the happiest of occasions. Long separations are hard on every member of the family, especially those left at home. As Army families, we learn to cope. Experience has shown that a deployment is much easier on families if they prepare for it and know the tricks of getting along during separation. Take advantage of the military support. Stay informed – get involved with your FRG. Nobody understands the Army like another Army spouse. By following some of these suggestions, deployments might go a little easier for your family.

Hints for the Spouse

KEEP IN TOUCH! Communicate with the soldier by e-mail, if possible, AND by writing, even if it is only a post card to say “I love you and miss you”. Soldiers love mail and need to hear from home frequently.

- Contrary to popular belief, in the case of family separation, “no news can be bad news!”
- Be sure to write regularly and to use the correct mailing address.
- Other address information will be issued by the unit, or if known, at the Pre-deployment briefing. FRG contacts will also know this information, if it is published.
- Keep in mind that if your spouse is far from home...
 - Plan ahead
 - Be aware of the possibility of mail arriving late
 - Mail may be slow
 - Money may not arrive according to schedule
 - Important documents may arrive too late to meet deadlines.
- It is OK to CRY.
- To reduce worries when you haven't heard from your spouse, you can get information on:
 - Where he/she is? (If able to be known)
 - How he/she is doing?
 - Rumors
 - Return Home

Call your unit point of contact or your contact in the Family Readiness Group.

Coping Strategies – The 4 M's

MAINTAIN

- Stay in good physical condition.
- Eat balanced meals.
- Get plenty of sleep.
- Keep in touch with positive people.
- Avoid things that make you feel worse.
- Avoid spending sprees, but treat yourself to a special outing.

MANAGE

- Manage your life. Set goals.
- Start a project that you've put off. Begin a self-improvement program or go back to school.
- Set time to be away from the children so you can take care of yourself.
- Travel – New scenery and a change of pace can do wonders for the spirit.
- Become a volunteer.
- Know your limits.

MONITOR

- Be aware of early signs of stress.
- Laugh: Don't lose your sense of humor.
- You are only human – Ask for help if you need it.

MANEUVER

- Relieve stress – try relaxation exercises
- Use coping strategies that work for you
- Stop and smell the roses

Helping Children Cope

- Help children communicate with the absent parent
- Ensure proper rest, nutrition, and exercise
- Discuss feelings about missing the absent parent
- Call their school to advise of the deployment
- Be consistent with discipline
- Spend special time with children
- Encourage them to spend time with friends
- Praise your children
- Be proud of their contributions

COPIES OF THE OPERATION READY CHILDREN'S WORKBOOKS
MAY BE OBTAINED FROM YOUR FAMILY PROGRAM OFFICE
BY CALLING 1-800-THE-ARMY, 1-HELP-1

The Blues and Handling Stress



When The Blues Get Bluer

Most families find the dinner hour and Sunday afternoon the times they miss their family member the most. Plus, almost everybody has an occasional blue Monday. If your blue days are increasing in frequency, pay attention to what is going on around you and in you. Are you:

- Feeling depressed?
- Losing interest in hobbies or things you enjoy?
- Feeling like you don't have energy to do things?
- Gaining or losing weight?
- Yelling at others or feeling irritable?
- Sleeping in later, having trouble falling asleep, or frequent awakenings?
- Withdrawing from people?
- Finding it difficult to concentrate?
- Spending a lot of time with your thoughts?
- Drinking more than usual or drinking alone?
- Having thoughts of suicide?

Depression is a side effect of separation that happens to some of us. Some use alcohol and drugs as a remedy, but it doesn't work. Drinking does nothing to answer life's problems.

The cure for depression is the same as prevention. Take positive action. Change your thoughts to change your feelings and reactions. Find something to do, and don't let yourself feel stuck in the house. If you can, talk to a friend. If you're alone, out of sorts, and problems seem overwhelming, seek help through your Family Readiness Group, the unit Chaplain, or other professional.

YOU CAN DO IT! When a loved one is away, you also need to get the sense you are moving up and forward. Frustration comes when you see others accomplishing things, while you are immobile,

waiting for your family member to return. If you have met with success before, you can do it again.

Handling Stress

- Take care of yourself.
- Make daily schedules of things that need to be done, but be reasonable.
- Get involved in things that make you happy.
- Avoid self-medication and abusing substances like drugs, alcohol, caffeine, nicotine, and food. Liquor and drugs reduce the perception of stress, but they don't reduce stress itself.
- Be flexible; accept that you can't control everything.
- Plan for stress. Set realistic goals that leave time for breaks and limit work. Take a stress reduction class.
- Keep a sense of humor with you at all times.
- Start thinking about what you really want out of life and begin to work towards those goals.
- Take a mental health day every two or three months.
- Avoid sulking. Let people know what you want.
- Learn how to express irritation and appreciation to others.
- Pick out somebody you work with and tell them something about yourself that you haven't told anyone else.
- Special instructions for Type A personalities (people who are fidgety and impatient):
 - Find a long line at the bank and wait in it. When you're ready to strangle the teller, ask yourself why you find it so difficult to be with yourself.
 - Do absolutely nothing but think about past accomplishments for 15 minutes.
 - Hear out two people without interrupting them once.

- Communicate with an old friend who has a profession different from yours.

Life Does Go On... The Separation Stage and Stabilization

At about 6 to 8 weeks after the member leaves, people start adjusting to the changes. Family rules, roles, and responsibilities are often realigned and structural changes adapt to the loss. Families find a new level of functioning without the previous ups and downs. Families that don't adjust and cope with the separation experience greater difficulties at this time. Often someone is feeling depressed. **If you believe you are suffering from depression or if your family can't seem to adjust, seek assistance.**

During the Stabilization Stage Most People Begin To:

- Realize at some point, usually midway in the deployment that "Hey, I'm doing OK."
- Establish new family patterns/inter-actions that do work for them.
- Feel more comfortable with their situation, self, and the reorganization of roles and responsibilities that do occur.
- Attempt and successfully accomplish some goals, which add to self-confidence and feelings of being able to cope.
- Reach out for support through friends, church, work, spouse groups, etc.
- Eat "fast food" to save time/energy and to appropriately choose priorities - let some things go to have more time.
- Have higher long distance telephone bills - but must learn to keep within budget.
- Go through the "my" syndrome: my house, car, kids, etc.
- Appear more mature and independent as "single" spouses since they have developed new activities and accepted more responsibilities to fill the void, while remaining secure in being married.
- Experience more sickness (at first), as the increased responsibilities tend to be more stressful until healthy coping skills are practiced.
- Feel vulnerable due to isolation from the military member, especially if recently moved to a new area without close friends or family.
- Spouses may feel uncertain of their abilities to cope and may experience self-doubt.
- Feel asexual, or no longer in need of sex or affection; or feel strangled due to suppressed needs and desires.
- Experience that a minor crisis can put them back into the disorganization stage.

You have many options to help you through the deployment. Set goals to accomplish during separation. Establish consistent ways to maintain

contact, and include the children. Set one night a week aside for family time. Make sure you give yourself a break each week and allow yourself some privacy. Get involved in activities.

If you feel your energy level is low, do something with a friend, your children, or relatives. Even after the 6 to 8 week adjustment period, mood swings may continue. Recognize the roller coaster as normal. If you feel your fears of infidelity rising, express to your spouse your trust. When you identify a problem, tell your spouse about it and what you're doing about it.

The most important thing to remember is to establish and maintain frequent contact. Separation from loved ones and significant others can be stressful and may lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation. Encourage your family to express feelings as early and openly as possible. Especially with children, be sure to offer love and reassurance while discussing fears or doubts anyone may have of future events. Keep lines of communication open and use them frequently. The chapter on communication in this Guide has some ideas for ways to communicate. Keeping in touch helps your family feel togetherness.

Sometimes a service member may really be missed. Don't try to fill their shoes, just do what you can as a family or individual. Share responsibilities with others and be fair and realistic. There are only 24 hours in a day! When things get to be too much, don't be afraid to ask for help! Many people such as friends, neighbors, relatives, and your Family Readiness Group Leader, would be glad to help.

How are you doing emotionally? Strong feelings are most common before and after separation and reunion, but they can occur any time. To help maintain your emotional health, consider learning new coping skills such as relaxation techniques, stress management, or parenting skills.

Anticipation of Homecoming

Several weeks or days, prior to the military member coming home the spouse will begin to feel a sense of anticipation "He/she's coming home and I'm not ready!" You and your family will experience anticipation, concern, increased adrenaline, and maybe even a drive for perfection. In anticipation, you may worry about the changes that took place during the separation. For instance, "Will my partner be happy with how I handled things?" You may notice differences in your phone conversations. How did you each adjust to your greater independence? The member may wonder if he/she is still needed.



Often spouses tend to:

- Compile a long list of things still left to do and begin to pick up the pace to get things done - a flurry of activity.
- Experience feelings of joy, excitement in anticipation of the military member's return and being together again.
- Experience feelings of fear and apprehension. "Does he/she still love me?"
- Clean the house of newly acquired activities to make room for the mate again. Some resentment may be felt at having to give up some of these things, and having to change again.
- Experience uncomfortable feelings - "I want him/her back, but what will I have to give up?"
- Feel tense, nervous & apprehensive - burying fears/concerns in busy work and activities.
- Experience a sense of restlessness again, but this is generally productive. Some spouses may feel confused due to conflicting emotions.
- Put off important decisions until the military member is home again.
- Experience changes in eating and sleeping patterns developed while the spouse was gone.

Children have concerns, too...

"Will my parent be proud of me?" "Will rules change again?" "Will my parent leave again?" "Will I be in trouble for some of the things I did?" Talking about these concerns helps children cope with them. One way to get children to talk about their concerns is for you to tell your children one of yours, and then ask them about their worries.

The Reunion Stage The Long Awaited Homecoming and The Readjustment Period

The third and final stage is reunion. This section discusses what you can expect. **Reunion is almost a mirror image of the Pre-Deployment stage.** You may find yourself having the ups and downs starting a few weeks prior

to the member's return. The adjustment period also lasts about 6 to 8 weeks, possibly longer. Most military families find that reunions are more stressful than the separation. This is true with all military members: couples with children, single parents, and single soldiers who are coming back to friends and family.

Re-negotiation of the Marriage

The husband and wife are back together physically but are not emotionally adjusted to being together. They still may feel distant, have trouble sharing decisions, and difficulty talking to each other.

The husband and wife:

- Need to refocus on the marriage, share experiences, feelings and needs, avoid forcing issues.
- Must stop being a "single" married spouse and start being married again. Go from independence to interdependence.
- May feel a loss of freedom and independence - feel disorganized and out of control as "deployment" routines are disrupted.
- Need to renegotiate roles and responsibilities. Husbands often feel isolated, unwanted, unneeded and left out during this phase, which can cause arguments and hurt feelings for both partners
- Need to be aware that too much togetherness can cause friction due to having been apart so many weeks/months.
- Need to begin to share the making of decisions that should be "their" decisions.
- Need to increase their time to talk together and with the children. They may want to plan special activities of short duration as a couple and as a family.
- Need to progress slowly with ardently desired sexual relations that may fall short of expectations. This can be frightening, and produce intense emotions. Couples may feel like strangers and be hesitant at first about intimate relations.
- Need to allow sufficient time to court each other before true intimacy can occur.
- May find questions threatening, interpreting the questions as being judgmental, not just curious.

This stage can renew and refresh a relationship, creating new trust and mutual understanding.

Expect To Have Doubts and Worries...

Realize that people change, especially children. Increased independence is a positive result of separations. Maintain realistic expectancies on the reunion. You may want the first night to be perfect: new clothes, a wonderful meal, and a spotless home. If you strive for perfection, you can end up feeling inadequate, irritated, and tired, because perfection is unrealistic.

- Partners may think the other doesn't need them anymore. Both may be more confident and independent. They may be afraid of criticism for the way that they have handled things.
- Single parents and single soldiers may have similar doubts about fitting into the environment to which they are returning.
- Anxiety is a natural and normal part of getting back together.
- Recognize that you will have these doubts, but don't take them too seriously.

Forget Your Fantasies...

Don't expect things to be exactly the same as they were when you left. Some things will change, but much will remain the same. Face it: your family has had a life while you've been gone. They have changed. Their day-to-day routines have changed. In many ways, it's a different family. If you expect them to be exactly the same, you're in for a rough landing.

- Give up any ideas you may have about Homecoming Day.
- Take it easy and let things happen naturally.
- Don't count on getting your fantasies fulfilled, especially your sexual fantasies.

The Readjustment Period

Accept And Share Your Feelings...

Communicate...Communicate...Communicate

- Sharing requires a lot of talking and listening.
- Active listening means to really listen, not thinking about how to defend yourself.
- If you need to clarify what was said, repeat it in your own words. When you understand, respond thoughtfully.
- You may have to renegotiate your relationship.
- You've changed; your spouse has changed; and your children have changed.
- If you expect them to be exactly the same, you're in for a hard time.
- Do not criticize each other for doing things differently from how they were done before separation.

Try To See Things From The Other's Point of View...

- Once the spouse realizes that the soldier no longer feels a part of the family, they will understand why the soldier is so touchy about even the smallest changes.
- Once the soldier sees the spouse's pride in the way he/she handled everything alone, the soldier will understand why the spouse gets upset when the soldier comes barging in to take over.
- These principles apply when dealing with each other and with children.
- Don't push yourself on your loved ones.
- Spend one-on-one time with them.
- Be patient.
- Cut them some slack when they're acting up, they too are a little stressed out.

The returning service member may want things to go back to how they were before the separation. That doesn't happen. People grow and change, so the family structure, while adjusting to the reunion, finds a new level of functioning. The service member may feel like an outcast. One way some people cope with these feelings is by acting like a guest at first. For instance, the children may no longer seek the returning parent's advice or help with things. Remember that your family had to change to survive so give them time and space to readjust. Things and changes will be unfamiliar. You'll need time to get reacquainted.

Intimacy takes time to develop with a spouse, children, and friends. Go slow and take time to get to know each other again. Schedule time for a family activity, dates with your partner and individual time with each child.

Take Time Off From Work To Decompress and Reacquaint

If possible, it is important for reservists to take some time off between the redeployment and re-entering the civilian workforce. Not only do reservists have to renew their family relationships, but they must also readjust to the return to work and the changes that have occurred while they were gone. Don't try to do it all at the same time.

If problems persist or your family takes more than 8 weeks to readjust, get help.



State of Equilibrium Reintegration and Stabilization

Sometimes within four to six weeks after homecoming, spouses have stopped referring to "my" car, house, kids, and return to using "we" or "our" and military members feel more at home, needed, accepted, and valued.

- New routines have been established and the family has adjusted to them.
- Both partners are feeling more secure, relaxed and comfortable with each other.

- The couple and family are back on track emotionally and can enjoy warmth and closeness to each other.

There can be numerous variations to the cycle. Short deployments can be very disruptive when there is not enough time to get used to the spouse being gone or home. Trying to say "Hello" and "Goodbye" at the same time is especially difficult. Unexpected changes can also be very difficult to deal with for all concerned, for example when dates for leaving or coming home are ambiguous or unknown.

Reunion Tips

Reunions are a time of readjustment after separation, whether long or short, planned or unplanned. Reunions can be both joyful and stressful because it's a big change that affects everyone with intense emotions. Roles and responsibilities may never return to "Pre-deployment" status. Plan to discuss responsibilities until roles are clearly defined again. The soldier needs to understand that the spouse has cared for and managed the household for the entire time they were deployed and that they should not expect to automatically resume the role they had. It would be unrealistic considering the time and effort put into surviving the separation.

Make it Easier for the Children

- Give the children time to adjust. When a parent has been away, it takes awhile to remember and accept the parent again. Young children may also be mad at a parent for leaving them. Babies may be afraid of a parent they've not recently seen.
- Expect them to test limits and to have a variety of emotions. Plan family time.
- Plan individual time with returning parent.
- Stay involved with school activities and interests; don't drop everything because the soldier has returned.

Tips For The Spouse Remaining Home

- Expect your spouse to be different. Think how much you have changed. Do not expect things to be perfect.
- Remember they have been subject to daily regimentation and routine. The returning service member may rebel against schedules and preplanned events. Leave some room for spontaneity.
- Avoid tight schedules.
- The returning soldier might not have been behind the wheel of a car for quite a while. Go ahead and drive.
- Expect them to have difficulty sleeping for a while. The soldier will have become accustomed to a different life style and perhaps a different time zone. It may take a week or two to adjust.
- Expect your spouse to be surprised or hurt that you've coped so well alone. You can reassure them that they are loved and needed, without giving up your own independence.
- Don't be defensive about the way you've handled the children. Discuss any criticisms calmly.
- Expect to take time to re-establish sexual intimacy.
- Expect to make some adjustments. Though you're looking forward to the soldier's return, it may be a challenge for them to adjust to changes in: where they sleep and for how long; what and

when to eat; the people you see; and what you do for fun. Don't question your spouse about real or imagined affairs. Don't poke around their belongings looking for "clues". Questioning your mate about infidelity can only destroy trust between the two of you.

Tips for the Service Member

- When you arrive back home, be patient and expect some changes.
- Consider yourself a guest. You're entering an environment that you've been absent from for some time. Don't expect to walk in and return to how things were. Give your family and yourself time to get readjusted. Maintaining stability when you left was important, and it's important again during the reunion. Let the adjustments come naturally, rather than trying to force it. If you try to force changes, your family will resist your efforts. Ask them to tell you what they expect from you, and you can express what you expect from them.
- Support positive changes. Show pleasure and interest in how your family has grown.
- Take it easy on the kids, especially where discipline is concerned. It's best for kids to have a constant routine, so let current rules stand. Don't barge in as the "heavy."
- Don't try to alter the financial affairs. Chances are, your spouse had been handling them fine. Remember that prices have probably soared while you were gone.
- Expect your spouse to be a little envious of your travels, so go easy on the descriptions of seven-course Asian banquets or German beerfests. Bring them a gift.
- Don't ask your spouse to pack the kids off to Grandma's so the two of you can have an intimate reunion. It's vital to reaffirm your bond with your children. Later, the two of you can slip away for a "second honeymoon."
- Expect sex to be awkward at first. Talk it over. Don't question your spouse about infidelity.

Whatever you've imagined while you were gone, it serves no purpose now.

- Expect your spouse to be different. They're more confident and independent. The fact that they can cope without you doesn't mean they want to.

- **ABOVE ALL - TALK WITH YOUR LOVED ONES!** Communication is the basis of healthy and growing relationships.

A Happy Homecoming



Preparing For A Happy Homecoming

- Talking about your feelings is an important part of preparing for a happy homecoming.
- Spouses may be wondering how much has their spouse changed? Have I made good decisions about our money? Did I do OK with the kids? Will I have to stop seeing my friends so much? Will we still have things to talk about?
- Service members may wonder: Will my family still need me? Will the kids recognize me? How did things go while I was gone? Will they be happy to see me?
- Children wonder, too: Will Dad (or Mom) come to meet my teacher? Will I get punished because I wasn't nice sometimes? Will the rules change at home? How long will Mom (or Dad) stay?

The single most important way to help ease the tension is to maintain communication throughout the separation. Talk about feelings and expectations, and be honest. Talk about changes and how roles, interests, and friends have changed. The old problems have not gone away. For instance, if you and your spouse disagreed about how to squeeze toothpaste from the tube before the separation,

chances are you'll continue to disagree about it for the next 40 years. Keep your expectancies realistic.

Some Tips For Homecoming

- **MAKE IT SPECIAL.** Plan a celebration, but keep your expectations realistic.
- **STAY FLEXIBLE.** He/she may be very tired. Leave room for changes.
- **STAY CONFIDENT.** Even though they may act differently, they are still the same people!
- **NEGOTIATE ACTIVITIES.** Make time for everyone's favorite activities on reunion day or after. Ask everyone for ideas.
- **MAKE INDIVIDUAL TIME.** It's important for spouses to spend time together without family or friends. It's a way to learn and grow together.
- **BE PATIENT.** Don't expect everything to happen at once. Readjustment can take weeks.
- **ADJUST GRADUALLY.** Start with small changes and make them slowly. Large or rapid changes in roles are often a shock for the whole family.
- **RE-THINK YOUR BUDGET.** Costs will be different with the service member home, and pay

may change, too. Set realistic goals, stick to your budget, and avoid over-spending.